

**Public Hearing on Third Beach Boat Ramp**  
**Middletown Town Hall Town Council Chambers**  
**August 22, 2011**

**Chairman Rian Wilkinson called the meeting of the Middletown Beach Commission to order at 7:04 p.m. Committee members John Bagwill, John Crimmins, Helen Flynn, David Leys, Bill Seiple were present; John Ceglarski was absent.**

**Rian explained the purpose of the public hearing, outlined a few rules for participants, and stated that the Beach Commission would make a recommendation to the Town Council, who will vote on the improvements to the Third Beach Boat Ramp in mid-September or October.**

**Town Administrator Shawn Brown and Town Engineer Warren Hall made a presentation that included a brief history of current efforts to repair the Third Beach Boat Ramp, the inadequacy of the current boat ramp, a powerpoint presentation of the proposed plans and of several different boat ramps in the area. Shawn also reviewed some Frequently Asked Questions that had been distributed to participants.**

**Warren reviewed the dimensions of the proposed boat ramp and discussed similarities with other boat ramps at Weaver Cove and Bristol, plus the use of similar materials at the Poplar Street ramp that is being constructed with Armor Flex.**

**At this time, Rian made a motion, seconded by Bill Seiple, to open up the public hearing; the motion passed unanimously.**

**George Allen, 444 Black Point Lane, Portsmouth, read a letter from the president of the RI Saltwater Anglers Association, which supports the new beach ramp and dock since it will enhance safety for the boating community.**

**Jack Replogle II, 37 Cornelius Drive, Portsmouth, has used Third Beach Boat Ramp for 35 years, and agrees with Mr. Allen that the pier is necessary to tie boats up to so boats don't get blown away and boaters don't get wet.**

**Restcom Peabody, 960 Mitchell's Lane, asked that the Beach Commission explore putting the boat ramp in the middle of Third Beach where the water is deeper. Rian explained that the Beach Commission already tried to do this, but that CRMC/NFW wouldn't allow the Town to do that because of the piping plovers.**

**Manuel Mello, Jr., 31 Beacon Terrace North, is not opposed to replacing the boat ramp, but does not think the Town should take federal money to replace the ramp or build a fixed pier.**

**Anthony Amado, 8 Lighthouse View, recommended that the Town explore putting in a hoist for handicapped boaters and/or sailors, to make getting into their vessels easier and more dignified. (Rian**

explained that a hoist would require a fixed pier.) He is concerned about the safety of children around the proposed pier. He thinks that the pier will interfere with the natural traffic on the beach. He also had a question about how the proposed ramp would make it easier to get a boat in the water at low tide (mean low water).

Ted Clement, Executive Director, Aquidneck Island Land Trust, 790 Aquidneck Avenue, Middletown, had two questions: the first about whether the improvements would degrade the natural state of Third Beach and the second about whether the improvements will degrade water quality at the beach. Rian replied that the pollution is more attributable to wildlife than to boats, and that the number of boats and trailers will remain about the same. Shawn added that the Planning Board will be considering the question of whether the proposed boat ramp fits in with the Town's Comprehensive Plan, and that the facility will actually decrease the likelihood of boating accidents

Judy Tucker, 106 Beacon Street and a board member of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, agrees that the boat ramp needs replacing, but fears that building a new ramp will increase traffic to the point where it will spoil the natural beauty of the beach.

Gladys Silveira, 132 Peckham Lane, doesn't want to see changes and wants to keep Third Beach the way that it is as a clean, safe swimming beach.

**Richard Laurie, 118 Kay Street, Newport, declined to speak since what he wanted to say had already been said.**

**Steve Berger, 31 Evergreen Avenue, would like more parking spaces for people eligible for handicapped parking; a ramp for handicapped people to access the beach; and have the Town employees assigned as lifeguards to also act as an attendant for the boat ramp in order to keep the kids safe.**

**Manuel Silveira III, 1141 Wapping Road, asked why the replacement costs were so much less than the original construction costs. He doesn't have a problem replacing the ramp but does not want the Town to accept federal funds.**

**John A. Van Beuren, 15 Indian Avenue, does not want a 9 foot high pier extending into the water. It would change the character of the beach from a family beach to a boating beach.**

**Carol Cummings, 738 Indian Avenue, asked that the Town withdraw its application. Shawn explained that the decision to withdraw the application would be up to the Town Council.**

**Gary Pavlik, 1140 Green End Avenue, noted that the gate to Third Beach parking lot is always open, and that as a consequence the Town is missing out on revenue because people arrive early and leave late to avoid paying for parking. He is not in favor of the project**

because he believes it will increase the number of boaters. Rian explained that the parking lot is left open to accommodate night fishermen. Dave Leys mentioned that the Beach Commission had considered charging for stickers for boat trailers of non-residents.

Steve Ponte, Middletown Harbor Master, 10 Maloney Lane, talked about his concerns about the many safety issues of the current inadequate ramp.

Phil Rondina, 379 Third Beach Road, is concerned about taking money from the federal government because it will tie the Town's hands when it comes to how much the Town can charge out-of-towners. He thinks that the Town should cover the costs of maintenance by charging non-residents.

Mary Alice Huggins, 65 Grey Craig Road, would like to get rid of the existing boat ramp, because she thinks that the boats obstruct the view of the cove. She wishes the Town would leave Third Beach alone as a family beach.

Bob Huggins, Portsmouth resident, enjoys boating but would like Third Beach to be left in its undeveloped state because any change would ruin the aesthetics.

Jocelyn Sherman, 83 Indian Avenue, strongly supports the need for a new boat ramp but not a fixed pier or a pump-out station. She does

not want the area turned into a marina; the current boating activity is already negatively impacting the eelgrass restoration. She asked if the Town had considered putting a boat ramp on the west side. Shawn explained that the west side property being considered for the Midway Pier is not suitable for a ramp. She asked if the Beach Commission would postpone making a decision until they had had time to consider all the information received, and until all members are present.

Dennis Zambrotta, 12 Florence Avenue, Newport and President of the Newport County Saltwater Fishing Club, read a letter expressing support of his club for the Third Beach Boat Ramp improvements. Approximately one-fifth of his membership is Middletown residents. He pointed out that the boaters and beach-goers have co-existed at that beach for years.

Anne Burns, 171 Tuckerman Avenue, is concerned about the expansion of parking that could negatively impact the environment and the wildlife. Bill Seiple stated that the Beach Commission also does not want to see parking expanded. She agrees that the Town needs a new boat ramp, and she likes the Bristol plan with handicapped accessibility, but thinks that the piers would detract from the visual aesthetic and natural beauty of the beach.

Dave Leys asked the Fire Chief to come forward and discuss public safety personnel's access to the water. Chief Ron Doire stated that

the pier would provide a distinct advantage for patient transfer. Also, the MFD currently uses Weaver's Cove for rescue training. Finally, the saltwater damages submerged MFD vehicles if they need to use the current boat ramp.

Bob Huggins asked why MFD is involved in ocean rescue when the Coast Guard has jurisdiction. Chief Doire explained that the Coast Guard does not have the resources to respond to all rescue operations in a timely manner and that all local communities use municipal personnel to respond because the response time is much shorter.

June Gibbs, 163 Riverview Avenue, concluded that everyone wants the boat ramp improved, but many object to the pier. She remembered that there was a referendum many years ago to put in a marina at Third Beach, which was defeated. She also brought up a land swap between the U.S. Government and the Town where the Town traded some land at Sachuest Point for land at Third Beach. She asked that the Town keep the area at Third Beach natural and as a swimming beach.

Bruce Burns, 29 Center Avenue, has been at Third Beach for years, and asked that an adequate pier be built that would allow boaters to tie up their boats, but that docks or associated floats are not needed.

Lou DiPalma, 24 Sail Court and RI Senator, thanked the Beach

**Commission for their hard work and due diligence in working on this issue. He offered his assistance at the state level, if needed.**

**Richard Bohan, 632 Tuckerman Avenue, stated that the Town needs a new boat ramp but not a structure that would disrupt the aesthetic of the beach. He suggested that the Town build railings along the ramp for people to use.**

**Phil Rondina added that in the early 1950s, a boat ramp was made at Third Beach by pushing in a bunch of junked cars and covering it with cement.**

**Bill Seiple spoke about how the pump-out facility is ecologically sound but not many boats in the harbor are of the size that really needs that service. The dock would help with safety issues. He said that the current ramp blends in so much with the beach that boaters have to take extra care when backing up their trailers so as to not hit pedestrians. If the ramp were replaced, it would not help with securing the boats that are just launched. It is important to delineate the swimming area from the boat ramp. He reminded everyone that this is the only boating access on the east side of the island. He himself uses Third Beach a lot for swimming, but as a member of the Beach Commission, he feels an obligation to the boating community, even though they are a minority. The Beach Commission has tried to make the beach experience better for all different segments of the population, but have not done anything recently for boaters. The**



**dock makes sense, because it will make the ramp safer by making it visually different. Dave Leys agreed with Bill.**

**Anne Burns repeated that the Town needs to stay away from federal money.**

**Rian made a motion, seconded by Bill Seiple, to close the public hearing. The motion was approved unanimously. Everyone took a short break at 9:25 p.m.**

**At 9:40 p.m., Rian called the Beach Commission meeting to order. John Bagwill made a motion to set the date for a special Beach Commission meeting to consider the input received at the public hearing and to vote on their recommendation to the Town Council. David Leys seconded, and the motion passed 5-1 (Bill Seiple opposed). Rian said he would set the meeting up within a week's time. Rian made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Bill Seiple, which passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.**

**mp Improvements**